

Kimi Zabihiyan in Hawaii finds the former champion moody, bored and primed to explode

Tyson trapped as a hostage in paradise

To be in Hawaii where Mike Tyson has his training camp is like being in paradise and finding that the devil is on vacation there. That is what he would have you believe, anyway. In front of the cameras and tape recorders this week, Tyson has sworn at, argued with and stared down those reporters "lucky" enough to be granted an audience with the "baddest man on the planet".

But away from the glare, spending time in his private beach-side villa in this plush of Hawaiian resorts — recent guests have included President George W. Bush and Michael Jordan — Tyson offers a rather different perspective; not so much the "dark guy from inequity" but a funny if moody man, bored by the restrictive environment in which he is training for his date with destiny and Lennox Lewis in Memphis, Tennessee, on June 8.

Tyson is a hostage in paradise, his access to the outside world strictly controlled by handlers desperate to keep him out of trouble that might jeopardise the fight — though he has surprised his fellow resort guests by sharing the gym with them most days.

"We're keeping Mike isolated here in Hawaii," said a bare-chested Showtime executive Jay Larkin, catching a few rays



Kea Lani resort on the island of Maui, where Tyson has his training base

of sun on the pristine resort grounds. "There's hundreds of millions of dollars riding on this fight."

For his part, Tyson seems to have stopped caring what the outside world thinks about him or his behaviour. He is sometimes petulant — the tough talk is probably just a means of keeping himself entertained — but he is also more focused on the job than for any recent fights and is in the shape to match.

Reflecting on his latest controversial sparring session with the press, Tyson says: "They say I'm great but do you know what's great? Out there, that's great," pointing at the Pacific Ocean. "When I came

here a couple of months ago I went out to sea and watched the whales rise out of the water, then go right down to the bottom of the ocean again. It was like a guided missile just shooting straight up. That's powerful."

Tyson is obsessed by the unseen forces of power, and there are DVDs of Chi Kung Fu movies lying around his villa — tales of Shaolin monks who tap their chi force to perform extraordinary acts of physical strength. Tyson says he regards the natural beauty of Hawaii as proof of God's existence. He talks about Allah, says he is still a Muslim but does not pray any more — "God knows what is in my heart".

He proudly shows off photos of his new son, born a month ago to his current girlfriend (his wife, Monica Turner, is filing for divorce). When I compliment him on his son's good looks, Tyson instead points to his large testicles. "He's the smallest of my babies, but with balls that big, he's got to be a fighter. I'm going to train him."

By now Shelley Finkel is anxiously trying to shoo me out of the villa. Finkel has been Tyson's adviser since the former champion left Don King in a split that has never fully been explained.



Mike Tyson relaxes at a gym in Maui as he prepares for his fight with Lennox Lewis Photograph: Reuters

A small, balding man, Finkel resembles an accountant more than a boxing man. He wears a

constant knotted expression and is often chewing his nails. A couple of times during this week's press conferences he has been heard to whisper: "Let's get everyone out of here before he explodes."

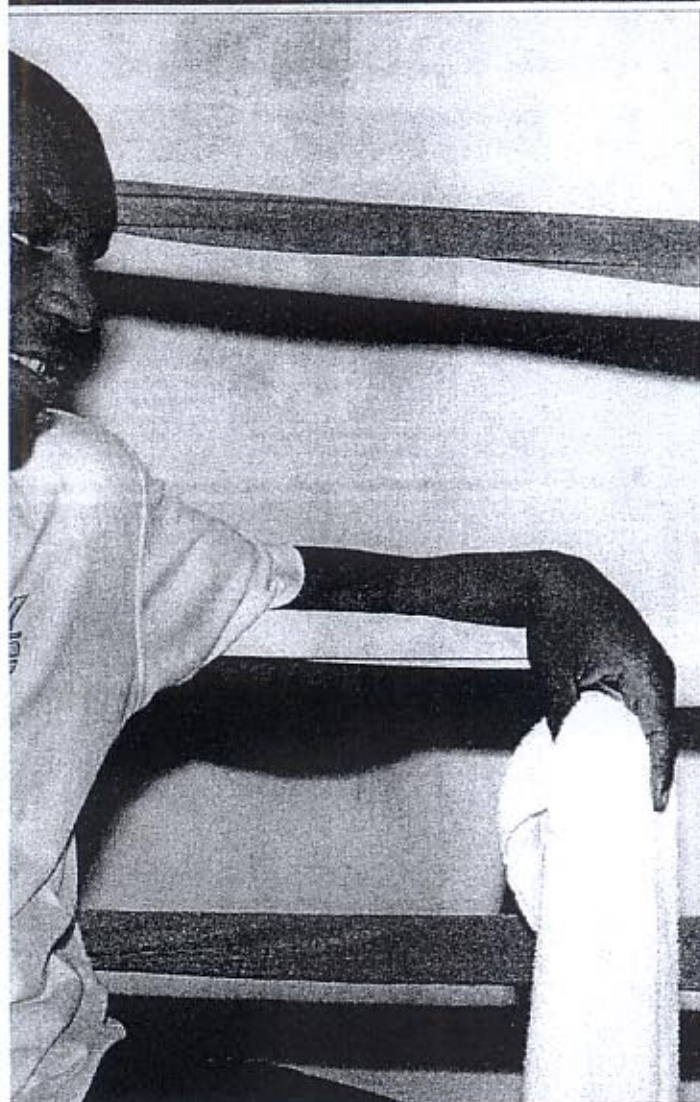
No one knows when or what

might trigger an explosion. "My fuse is so short right now that if anyone disrespects me, I might kill them," Tyson says. After giving me a playful high-five on my departure, I can still feel the sting 45 minutes later. In the Tyson camp the fear is

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'I'm not criminally lascivious. I train hard. I play hard. I sacrifice so much, can't I at least get laid?' Mike Tyson

go," Tyson says bluntly, "but I'll always look out for Jay."

It is not clear whether Tyson is currently taking medication. The lack of medical supervision and help was the Nevada State Commission's main reason for turning down his application for a boxing licence in Las Vegas, which is why the Lewis fight is taking place in Elvis City rather than Sin City.

"Mike should be on antidepressants," says the ESPN television reporter Max Rohmer. "But these days the athletes are paying the bills, so they're running things and if Shelley Finkel says go and do this, who can make Mike Tyson do anything?"

Defiantly, Tyson pronounced this week: "I'm Mike Tyson. I'm the biggest fighter in the history of the sport, and if you don't believe me go check the cash register. I'm gonna be 36. I never thought I'd live this long or fornicate with as many beautiful women."

His crew nod and grin in agreement, for what falls off Tyson's table inevitably lands in their laps. The cash registers were ringing most when he earned \$150m (£102m) in 18 months from King for a series of fights in Las Vegas. After the Holyfield ear biting incident, however, Tyson left King and his pay cheques have been shrinking too.

But despite the trappings, Tyson is massively in debt. "It's an open secret that Mike owes lots of money to Showtime TV," says Sky's boxing commentator Ian Darke. "Though the purse for this fight is substantial, it still won't wipe out all his debts. He is in hock to the TV company. He is manacled to them for life."

Previously, of course, King

was the main man in Tyson's life. "Mike never even picked up the phone to say what the problem was," King said from New York yesterday in reference to their break-up. "When he was with me, I had a structure in place to help him with doctors, medication and even hypnosis. I used the leverage and power to help Mike get help, get paid and get prestige, and everybody else got paid too. I am a 'Tyson' in the business world. The TV networks want to dole out what they want to give you. I insisted we be paid appropriate for what we were worth. They wanted to get me out of business and break us up. It's a shame what's happening to Mike now. He could've become the first billionaire athlete, but he wants to do everything himself and he'll end up destroying himself before that."

"Death is the only freedom a nigga knows," Tyson says in one of this week's many darker moods. He says he cannot see himself doing anything else except fight, but he can't fight till he's 60 — "so you go figure it out".

Still, if Tyson wins on June 8, he will become world heavy-

weight champion 16 years after he first took the title. "Who would've thought he would have even lived this long?" wonders one reporter.

"I could have been anything, it's just that Cus got a hold of me first so I became a fighter," says Tyson, speaking of his late mentor and trainer during his formative years. "Cus always used to make me feel guilty if I wanted to buy a two-seater car; he'd say don't be so selfish, don't you want to give anyone a ride. Get a four-door. So I'd go and get a four-door car when I really wanted a two seater. Now I just do what I want and don't care what anyone thinks of me."

When you're a one-man industry, it is perhaps not surprising if you feel the right to be yourself and please yourself. But ultimately for Tyson, that always means descending to the lowest common denominator, even though he clearly has an intellect above that.

"I'm not criminally lascivious," Tyson says. "I think it's un-American not to take a lady out on a date. I train hard. I play hard. I sacrifice so much, can't I at least get laid?"

"Mike going over the edge" incident with an unsustaining member of the public old cost millions, and the ring among the fight circle America is "this fight ain't a hit until it's a fight". Things change minute to

minute with Mike," explains one of his crew. Staying on the island is like being on the TV show Survivor — every week a member of the entourage is voted off. This week it was Steve "Crocodile" Fitch, who has been Tyson's cheerleader

and chief rabble-rouser for more than 10 years. Jay Bright, who went back to the Catskill days when Tyson was a teenager training with Cus D'Amato, has also been voted off the island. "Jay is family and family is always the first to

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Lewis calls on Nation of Islam for protection

by Ian Rawling

Snook Lewis's personal security will be provided by members of the controversial Nation of Islam group the build-up to his fight against Mike Tyson and on a night itself. Tyson's outburst that he

referring to Jews as "blood-suckers" who prayed in "synagogues of Satan".

Lewis's advisers have tried to force the promoters to pay for his bodyguards and the onus was put on the Tyson camp to find the \$250,000 (£170,000) Lewis was

as a figure close to the fight. But his influence is clear, not least in that his son Mustafa has become a regular fixture within the Tyson camp since 1999 and Farakhan himself was at ringside as far back as 1997 for Tyson's second fight against Evander Holyfield.

Pocono mountains of Pennsylvania next week.

All 19,000 tickets for the fight have been sold — mainly to agents and travel companies — generating a live gate of more than \$23m, \$6m more than the record in 1999 when Lewis beat Holyfield in their